

Assignment was a Maryland first

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SUN STAFF

Vivian V. Simpson, a Rockville attorney and champion of female rights, made Maryland history when she was appointed Maryland's first female secretary of state by Gov. William Preston Lane in 1949. She remained in office until 1951.

At her swearing-in ceremony that December, some 700 Democrats and Republicans jammed the House of Delegates chamber. Most were women.

"It is a great moment in the history of Maryland," said India Edwards, director of the women's division of the Democratic National Committee.

"I am deeply gratified by the confidence which the Governor has reposed in me," said Simpson, dressed for the ceremony in a black wool suit highlighted with a corsage of orchids and wearing a large picture-window hat covered in pink roses.

Simpson, 46, initially had to overcome a rumor that suggested that she was a "man hater."

"Actually, I'm very fond of men," she told the *Evening Sun*.

"And why shouldn't she be fond of the men?" asked the newspaper. "Didn't one of them appoint her to her present position of honor? Didn't the boys out in Montgomery County elect her to be the first woman president of their bar association and declare a one-day holiday for the courts the day she was sworn in as secretary of state?"

"Vivian gets on beautifully with the opposite sex. For seven years she served as the first woman member of the State Industrial Accident Commission and at the time of her appointment to her present post, was vice chairman of the commission appointed to study the workmen's compensation laws of the State," observed the newspaper.

The Washington native, who later attended the University of Maryland, caused a sensation by flaunting university rules at College Park in the early 1920s.

She was charged by university officials with ignoring rules regarding signing out of the women's dormitory, "making fudge after lights out," and wearing "kimonos at an improper time."

"She did not make the fudge, she confided yesterday. She merely ate it. Vivian is no cook. It was a roommate who made the stuff. Why, she recalls, her fellow culprit

often accused her of 'being long on the eating and short on the beating.' And how true it was, she confirms," reported the *Evening Sun*.

Simpson left U of M for George Washington University, where she received her bachelor's degree in 1925 and a law degree in 1927. She was admitted to the Maryland Bar in 1928 and later opened a law office in Rockville.

In 1940, she was the first woman to be named a commissioner to the State Industrial Accident Commission by Gov. Herbert R. O'Connor. The commission adjudicated cases involving persons injured in extra-hazardous employment. She resigned in 1948.

One of her responsibilities as secretary of state was to attest to the authenticity of the governor's signature.

However, Simpson admitted to reporters, she could not type.

"She had a feeling, she related, that if she learned to type she would wind up a stenographer. She didn't want to be a stenographer. She wanted to be a lawyer. So she

just never learned to type," said the *Evening Sun*.

An editorial in *The Sun* at the time said: "The title of Secretary of State is an impressive one, but the duties that go with the office are neither intellectually exacting or burdensome. The secretary is custodian of the great seal, attests the governor's signature, does other kinds of certifying, and is custodian of various official records. ... The gallantry popularly accorded to all Maryland men demands that they welcome the opportunity of Miss Simpson with open arms."

Active in Democratic politics, Simpson urged her female supporters to "Get young blood in your organizations" and reminded them of the "dignity of doorbell pushing."

After returning to private practice, she served as vice president of the Maryland State Bar in 1958 and in 1959.

Maryland would not have another female secretary of state after Simpson's departure for 31 years, and has only had three in



SUN FILE PHOTO

Politician: Vivian V. Simpson became the first female Maryland secretary of state in 1949.

the position since the office was created in 1838.

In 1982, Gov. Harry R. Hughes appointed Patricia G. Holtz to the office, and she was followed by Lorraine M. Sheehan in 1983.

Rob Kasper

Tunnel can disrupt the peace

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get there. Just like shooting the rapids, you get your craft in position early and, when the excitement hits, you go with the flow.

Over the years "the flow" has plopped us in a variety of difficult spots, but we seem to have an attraction to Broome Street. This is a perilous piece of pavement, because if you make a wrong move in this vicinity you can end up in the jaws of death; that is, back inside the Holland Tunnel headed back to New Jersey.

Do I exaggerate? Perhaps a bit. But that is because in order to get to the Holland Tunnel from Baltimore I have spent hours on the New Jersey Turnpike, an experience that distorts my view of the real world. For instance, as the Jersey Turnpike nears New York, it fans out to five lanes. Theoretically all these extra lanes are a good thing, because they help move traffic along. The trouble is that when you leave the turnpike and head for the Holland Tunnel, the road narrows to two lanes, but the natives con-

tinue to drive as if there are still five lanes.

The two legal lanes are treated as three lanes and the shoulders become the lands of derring-do. That is one reason I get so angry when, after being spit out of the Holland Tunnel, I appear to be headed back to Jersey. There are other reasons, too. There is the whole man-woman, husband-wife, pilot-navigator dynamic, a scenario that lends itself to a lot of "spirited discussion."

A few days before we left Baltimore I tried a tactic to cut down on our spirited discussions — and keep us from getting lost. I looked at maps. First I looked at a couple of foldout maps of Manhattan. These would be quite helpful if I were walking, or riding a subway into the city. But since I was foolhardy enough to be driving my family four-door into Gotham, these maps weren't for me. For instance, these maps tend to get fuzzy on which streets someone would take to free himself from the chaotic traffic circle outside the Holland Tunnel and venture to Washington Square

Park, the nearby neighborhood where our friends reside.

So in search of better information I fired up the computer. I went on the Web and called up a map of the Holland Tunnel exit, looked at a map of Southwestern Manhattan and got a trip planner from MapQuest.com. Both maps showed a detailed grid of the streets. But the set of instructions with one map advised taking a "slight left" from the circle onto Ericsson Place, while both maps showed that the turn should be a right.

As it worked out, we never made it to Ericsson Place. My navigator, for reasons that remain her closely held secret, disregarded our plan and the printed directions, and had me turn at another traffic circle exit.

We ended up sandwiched between some big trucks with rusty wheels. Luckily all of us were headed north on Hudson Street. We avoided heading back to New Jersey. We avoided hitting any other cars or pedestrians. We wended our way toward our friends' home and I put the car in a parking garage, an action that relieved me of a large wad of cash.

Unlike previous years, my wife and I were on speaking terms this year when we arrived in New York. But just once I would like to get there by following directions.